Harriet Van Horne

WHAT IF HE WON'T GO?

To the dear-bought wisdom of Watergate, add this: Americans, those proud and stubborn patriots, can now think the unthinkable and speak the unspeakable.

This explains the growing frequency of the remark, "Suppose they impeach him and convict him and he just won't go? What then?"

Call the question ridiculous, paranoid or melodramatic, it still won't go away. Serious, non-hysterical Americans are asking it. And they're asking it because something in the character of President Nixon—the rigidity, the lust for power, the flouting of rules and tradition — makes them wonder.

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It should be perfectly clear by now that the agony of Watergate has neither strengthened nor sweetened the character of Nixon. White House stalwarts have endeavored to paint him in martyr's robes: a kindly, misunderstood man, betrayed by friends, reviled by foes. We try to accept it—but it won't wash. In the words of Milton, "Ye cannot make them chaste that came not hither so."

In the stubbornness of Nixon there is, at least, consistency. This could be ominous, too. In the plotting of his defense, in all the ruses and stratagems, there is a shrill, defiant note that says, "Unhorse this man if you dare!"

Rereading Nixon's speeches on Vietnam, there are certain recurrent phrases that make one uneasy. "We will not be humiliated . . . We will not be defeated . . . It is our will and character that is being tested." And so on. It's the rhetoric of an all-or-nothing, now-or-never personality.

Though the "psycho-historians" are not held in high esteem at the moment (the glib ones have written some trashy tomes, dissecting the Nixon psyche with dinner knives), nobody has refuted the scholarly dissertation on "The Presidential Character" by Dr. James David Barber. It is he who tells us that the President is "crisis-prone," that he creates crises to fill certain needs in his character.

The great danger, Barber has warned, is that the frustrations and "erosions of self" Nixon is experiencing will accumulate, leading to some rash action by which he will attempt to "rescue, as he sees it, his Presidential heroism."

Should Nixon somehow escape impeachment, he will not, of course, be driven to any sort of desperate action. And he will again find, in his suffering and struggling, what Barber calls "a confirmation of his own goodness." Such has been the pattern in previous Nixon crises.

This time the stakes have a life-and-death quality. The Judiciary Committee has built, with meticulous care, a case that must occasionally terrify the President's lawyers, as they contemplate the full, majestic force of it.

A small book arrived in the mail this week, sure of a high place on history's shelf. "The Offenses of Richard Nixon: A Guide for the People of the United States." It's the work of four young attorneys named William Dobrovir, Joseph Gebhardt, Samuel Buffone and Andra Oakes. The book lists 28 legal violations which President Nixon allegedly committed or "caused to be committed." Most people by now are familiar with the litany. And most people, one

begins to suspect, are fully prepared for impeachment proceedings to get under way.

The argument advanced last summer—"It would tear the country apart"—no longer holds. The country is being torn far worse by the indecision, the suspense, the lessening of faith in the federal government. Impeachment would come now as "a prophylactic," says Professor Raoul Berger. And that is precisely what the Founding Fathers had in mind, as both Madison and Hamilton made clear in the Federalist and other writings.

Now, then, back to the unthinkable. What if the Senate finds the President guilty and the President refuses to budge? Can the Commander-in-Chief proclaim, "General, I'm ordering you to seize the United States"? Milton Viorst put this question to some high-ranking military men and reports their answers in the current issue of Esquire. It's doubtful that the quotes from the brass will soothe your sleepless nights.

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Most officers quizzed dismissed the idea of a Presidential coup d'etat as nonsense, straight out of "Seven Days in May," a book they all seem to have read with disbelief.

According to the Army's Judge Advocate General, Maj. Gen. George S. Prugh, an order from the Commander-in-Chief *must* be obeyed. Personal views do not excuse disobedience. "The military is not a debating society," a major with a law degree told Viorst.

Of course, nobody believes it could happen here. Not really. And some expect the President to resign rather than face impeachment. What is significant — and deeply troubling — is that the question, "Suppose he just won't go?" is no longer shrugged off as a wild thought from cuckoo-land. I don't believe it, you don't believe it. But it's healthier to air one's fears—however preposterous—than to brood about them in the dark of night.